

# Abstract

## **Subsidization of general social assistance**

*The Court of Audit checked whether general social assistance was subsidized in accordance with the current regulation. The audit showed that the objectives framed in the Flemish decree of 19 December 1997 had not yet been achieved. This allowed the centres for general social assistance (hereafter CGSA) to have a large leeway in selecting their activities so that gaps and overlaps were still to be found in their welfare offer. A real system of subsidization by programme and staff allocation in function of objective parameters had not been implemented. The department responsible paid very little attention to the financial aspects of the CGSA operation. According to the Court of Audit, the Flemish authorities should play a more steering role and monitor and evaluate the policy implementation.*

## **Amalgamation of various welfare associations**

In the nineties, under the initiative of Flemish authorities, the smaller non-profit associations active in the field of social welfare amalgamated to become the CGSA in existence now. The department failed to adequately monitor these amalgamations. More often than not it is unclear what became of the former non-profit associations and their property. A few non-profit associations continued to be in existence with or without their same mode of operation. Sometimes they remained active as patrimonial non-profit associations; in such a case, at least their property was not transferred to the CGSA.

## **Eligibility criteria and subsidization**

The government failed to draw up a planning scheme or stipulate skills requirements to be fulfilled by the staff. Furthermore, funding by programme in function of objective and external parameters had not yet been completed although the transitional period was due to expire on 31 December 2002. Subsidies are still being calculated in function of every centre's own situation, namely its 1995 (staff) costs. This generates considerable differences among centres in terms of subsidization per staff member.

## **Policy plans and tasks**

Failing a planning scheme and a precise task description, policy plans are an essential instrument to evaluate the CGSA operation. However, the objectives contained in these plans had much more to do with their own organization and much less with the effects the CGSA wished to achieve on society. Actually the CGSA carried on with the activities of the collectivities amalgamated into the CGSA, which explains the very differing offer provided. In addition the CGSA often adjusted its policy plans, normally applicable for 3 years, unilaterally and without accounting for it. Under such circumstances policy plans are not contracts negotiated between the government and the CGSA: government's input in terms of task description is very minimal. When public authorities wished to achieve a specific policy objective, they did not use policy plans, but allocated additional staff for specific or supplementary tasks or for projects.

## **Reporting procedure**

As policy plans failed to mention objectives, timing, etc., it goes without saying that the yearly reports were also inadequate, even to the point that it was difficult to make out whether the objectives were or were not achieved. Neither the department concerned nor the inspection unit paid attention to the financial and accounting aspects of the reporting procedure : this was, for instance, reflected in the fact that a few CGSA set up provisions with high amounts without accounting for them and very probably erroneously.

## **Minister's response**

The minister announced that she would tackle the issue of the decree's implementation (planning scheme, funding...) and would consider the possibilities for a better stewardship, monitoring and evaluation of the general social welfare system in cooperation with the department and the sector.